



SE Education
HD **Should a teacher report a pupil for Extinction Rebellion activism?**

BY Donna Ferguson

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LP

Teachers respond to police Prevent guidance requiring them to do so

Counter-terror police issued [guidance](#) requiring teachers to report members of Extinction Rebellion to the authorities under the Prevent powers. The guide was recalled after the Guardian revealed its existence, but later another [list](#) emerged citing the group, as well as Greenpeace and Stop the Badger Cull.

TD

Ed Finch

Teacher, Larkrise primary school, Oxford

No. While I would report a pupil for extremism if I believed they had motive, intent and ability to endanger property or life, I know numerous people who are involved in [Extinction Rebellion](#), including pupils. I don't believe they have any intent to endanger life or property.

If I was told I had to, as part of my job, I would contest that. If the point was pushed, I would involve my union, which would support me.

Suggesting that peaceful protesters from Extinction Rebellion are somehow equivalent morally to far-right activists who seek to intimidate and spread hate and fear is offensive and, frankly, silly.

To include Extinction Rebellion in a list alongside terrorist organisations criminalises precisely the intelligent, thinking young people most likely to be an asset to the country in the future.

If I believed a young person had the motive, the intent and the ability to cause criminal damage or to endanger life, I would deal with that as a matter of urgency. I would not report them for an Extinction Rebellion logo on a schoolbag or for an interest in Greta Thunberg.

Roshan Doug

Education consultant

Yes, if the student was breaking the law or was likely to endanger other people or themselves. If Extinction Rebellion was categorised as an extremist organisation on the Prevent list, I would report a student who was a member of it.

I don't think I would report a student for going on a peaceful protest. It depends on what he or she was going to do. If it starts interfering with transport or impinging on people's ability to get to work, causing havoc and inconvenience, that would be a concern for me.

I think parts of Extinction Rebellion's ideology are extreme. There are certain people who are blowing up [the issue of climate emergency], like a certain young girl, Greta Thunberg, who is accusing our generation of messing up the world and saying we should be ashamed of ourselves.

Too many teachers have a leftwing agenda. Some are allowing youngsters to miss a whole day of lessons to protest. That is irresponsible.

Everyone talks about the changing climate and its effects, but there are countries that don't take it at face value. In Russia and India, educationists do not put forward this idea that there's climate change taking place and it's going to affect the world, and we are going to be flooded in 30 or 40 years.

I think students don't really question, in a critical way, the information about climate change they are being fed through the education system and the media. I don't understand how 16- or 17-year-olds know enough about it to be protesting. I would like to see youngsters being more sceptical about the information that is being given to them.

Niamh Sweeney

Teacher, Long Road sixth-form college, Cambridge

I would report someone for extremism, because extremism is the opposition to rule of law, liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of faiths and beliefs. It would be a safeguarding concern.

But involvement in climate activism – absolutely not. I want my students to be radical thinkers. Students getting involved in political issues is really important to their personal development.

Extremism, for me, is about behaviour – particularly with regard to risk-taking or acts that could be deemed terrorism or illegal. For example, the climate extremists who climbed on top of a train: I would have safeguarding concerns about behaviour like that.

If one of my students were contemplating doing something that risked their lives or the lives of others, I would perceive that as extremism and I would consider reporting them. Initially, though, I would have a conversation with them. Safeguarding concerns are unlikely to arise overnight - there are often changes in behaviour over time that teachers notice.

I would not consider Extinction Rebellion to be extremism. We have to be really careful not to label something as extreme just because we don't like it.

Lee Jones

(not her real name) Art teacher, Greater London

No. I am an Extinction Rebellion (XR) activist myself and, as a teacher, I'm horrified by the prospect of teachers being asked to report students supporting XR as extremists.

I would not report them and I would feel incredibly compromised, professionally, if I was asked to. If that was part of my role as a teacher, I would be wholly uncomfortable with it. I would rather quit my job.

As educators, we have a duty to make sure students know about the extent of the climate crisis and are armed with the facts. The young people I've met through XR and the climate strikes have, without exception, been passionate, well-informed and articulate. They are also genuinely fearful about climate change and I think their reactions are entirely proportionate. I don't think we should be reporting them or locking them up. I think we should be championing these young people, because they're compassionate and responsible. We have so much to learn from them.

Malcolm Wilson

Primary school teacher, Buckinghamshire

I would report an eco-terrorist who was planning to do something dangerous. But I would not report a student for being a member of Extinction Rebellion. I would, however, report a child for changes in their behaviour or anything they said or did that led me to believe they were moving away from straightforward protest into extremism.

I am a Quaker and one of my beliefs is that I must care for the planet. If guidance was issued to me from the police suggesting that Extinction Rebellion was an extremist organisation, I would ask for evidence. If the evidence was not forthcoming and it was clear this was a politically motivated decision as opposed to a real risk-based decision, as a Quaker, I might be guided by my beliefs to break the law and not report the child. And I would accept the consequences of that.

- This article was amended on 22 January 2020. The original said that Roshan Doug was an education academic at the University of Birmingham. Doug holds a doctorate in education from the university but he is not on its academic staff.

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